

HOOSIER WOMEN AT WORK

STUDIES IN INDIANA WOMEN'S HISTORY

Session 1

April 2018

The Museum Extension Project: “Bringing a Vision of the World to Those Who Otherwise Can Never See It”

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This paper and presentation will explore the Museum Extension Program (MEP) during the Great Depression. The quirky Works Progress Administration project combined elements of the Federal Arts Project and the Women's and Professional Division. With a dual focus on creating visual aids to educate young people and providing jobs for qualified workers, the products created provide an interesting opportunity to explore changing ideas about ethnicity, education and Indiana's relationship to the rest of the world.

Women shaped the MEP project and its products as museum educators, project administrators and object creators. My research examines the MEP's 'doll project' as a material culture study in the power of hand-made figures to encourage recent European immigrants to construct American identities as members of the white majority during a time of great social upheaval. It explores the roles of Grace Golden, Estelle Bell and producers of dolls held by The Children's Museum of Indianapolis. The work of these women in disseminating the MEP project throughout the state, selecting appropriate figures for use as visual teaching tools and finally as producers of dolls respectively, afforded students, parents and teachers the opportunity to experience the world beyond Indiana's borders.

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